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RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 0085
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 0075
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LISBON 002570

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SUBJECT: MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS: AN UPBEAT ABBAS IN
LISBON

Classified By: political/economic counselor Matt Harrington for reasons
1.4 (B) and (D).

Summary

1. (C) During a one-day visit to Lisbon on September 29, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas met with the entire senior leadership of Portugal, which currently holds the EU's rotating six-month presidency. Abbas said he was encouraged by his talks with the U.S. and others in New York and reported that his talks with Israeli PM Olmert are going well. He said the November conference would be crucial in advancing the peace process and he hoped for broad participation. He encouraged the EU to express public support for the ongoing talks and the November conference, and to send senior visitors to the region as a sign of its strong engagement. The Portuguese were primarily in listening mode, and would like to be helpful where possible. End Summary.

2. (C) Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas stopped in Lisbon for meetings with Portuguese officials on September 29, on his way back from the UN General Assembly. He met separately with President Cavaco Silva, Prime Minister Socrates, National Assembly President Jaime Gama, and the UN Secretary-General's special representative for dialogue among

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civilizations, former Portuguese President Jorge Sampaio. Abbas was accompanied by Minister of Information Riad Malki and members of his negotiating team, Ahmed Qorei and Yasser Rabo.

Portuguese message

3. (C) According to MFA Middle East/Maghreb Director Isabel Pedrosa, all Portuguese interlocutors stressed the following points in their talks with Abbas:

--they expressed strong support for the current bilateral talks, noting they had created a positive momentum;
--they underscored the urgent need to make progress; and
--they emphasized the imperative of ensuring the November conference is a success.

Abbas upbeat

14. (C) Abbas was very upbeat in Lisbon, Pedrosa told us. He was clearly pleased with his discussions in New York with the United States, FM Livni, key Arab leaders, and others and seemed convinced there is a real chance now to achieve progress. He said his talks with Olmert are going well and are focused on securing agreement on a framework document that would form the centerpiece of the November conference.

November conference crucial

15. (C) Abbas described the upcoming November conference as crucial and underscored that the EU has a significant role to play in laying the necessary groundwork. Specifically, he encouraged EU leaders and other senior officials to express public support for the Israeli-Palestinian talks and to further demonstrate the EU's engagement through frequent visits to the region. It is essential, he underlined, that the November conference have a substantive agenda and achieve concrete results. He hoped there would be very broad participation and saw possible Syrian attendance as a positive. He expressed concern that the Saudis might be reluctant to engage after the failure of their initiative and thought it important they be reassured they remain key players in this process.

16. (C) The Palestinian Authority President said the conclusions/objectives agreed in November would subsequently be subjected to the approval of all Palestinians in a referendum. He acknowledged that that would not be an easy effort.

Comment

17. (C) In their capacity as EU president, the Portuguese

LISBON 00002570 002 OF 002

viewed Abbas's visit, his first to Lisbon, primarily as an opportunity to hear his views on the latest developments and to stress the importance of concrete progress in the peace process. Our interlocutor seemed struck by Abbas's optimism, his apparent belief that real progress seems possible at the moment.

Hoffman